Whose Agenda Is Served by the Idea of a Shia Crescent?

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Abstract

After the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, it became evident that Iraq’s Shia majority would dominate the future government if a free election was going to be held. In 2004, Jordan’s King Abdullah, anxiously warned of the prospect of a “Shia crescent” spanning Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. This idea was then picked up by others in the Arab world, especially Egypt’s President Mubarak and some elements within the Saudi government, to reaffirm the Iranian ambitions and portray its threats with regard to the Middle East. This article seeks to unearth the main causes of promoting the idea of a revived Shiism by some Arab countries, and argue that it was basically proposed out of the fear that what the American occupation of Iraq unleashed in the region would drastically change the old Arab order in which Sunni governments were dominant. While Iran downplayed the idea and perceived it as a new American conspiracy, it was grabbed by the Bush administration to intensify its pressures on Iran. It also sought to rally support in the Arab world for US Middle East policy in general, and its failed policy toward Iraq in particular. Thus, to answer the above mentioned question, a close attention would be paid to both the Arab and Iranian agenda in the Middle East after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in order to establish which entities benefit most from the perception of a Shia crescent.